

Network Rail Comments – Response Note

This Note sets out the Applicant's (Oxfordshire County Council) response to Network Rail's comments dated 6th January 2022.

New highways crossing of railway: Didcot Science Bridge

The proposals include a new crossing of the Great Western Main Line at a point adjoining the former Didcot Power Station site. The four lines to be crossed in this location comprise the Up and Down Main, the Didcot Relief Line and the Milton Siding. This section of the GWML is already electrified. Strategic planning by the rail industry has identified that this part of the GWML is already subject to significant capacity constraints; and new proposals are being developed for additional passenger and freight services. Therefore, additional capacity is likely to be needed in the future, potentially achieved by four-tracking between Didcot and Swindon.

The Didcot Science Bridge element of the wider highways scheme is already benefitting from joint working between Network Rail and the scheme promoter. It is understood that Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) first approached NR (ASPRO) in 2014. The scheme was initially considered to be outside party, as there were no piers proposed on NR land, however once designs had been developed the needs for piers then arose.

Network Rail are currently engaged via a Basic Asset Protection Agreement (BAPA) for the design of the Science Bridge, with Approval in Principle in place and a letter of 'No Objection' being issued to OCC in October 2021. It is understood that OCC are currently tendering for a Design and Build Contractor.

Going forward, a Bridge Agreement and Easement (with Heads of Terms agreed) for the air rights over the railway will be put in place.

Stakeholders including the scheme applicants will be aware of the critical strategic nature of the GWML rail corridor, and Network Rail looks forward to continuing our collaborative work in support of this new bridge scheme.

Applicant Response: Noted, the Applicant will continue to work with Network Rail regarding the Didcot Science Bridge.

New highways crossing of railway: Appleford Sidings Bridge

The proposals include a new road crossing of the single-track link from the Didcot-Oxford main line to Appleford Sidings, a busy aggregates terminal.

The existing operations currently utilise hopper and box wagon types that would not require a high degree of gauge clearance. However, based on wider policy aspirations towards decarbonisation, rail operators are reviewing options for accommodating new traffic and it would be appropriate to allow for this under future proposals.

Therefore, we recommend that the crossing design allows for W12 gauge clearance of the railway, to facilitate a wider variety of rail freight traffic to serve the site. Network Rail does not itself own the Appleford sidings or its access- the NR land boundary is east of the point where the bridge would cross the access to the sidings. It is understood that the rail network beyond this point is owned and operated privately, by Hanson. Therefore, we recommend that consultations for this scheme should include direct contact with this landowner.

Applicant Response: We can confirm that the clearance of the Appleford Sidings Bridge has been agreed with Hanson, taking into account their maintenance requirements and will not preclude any potential electrification in the future.

Appleford level crossing impacts

Network Rail has previously received a scoping opinion request for the Didcot Garden HIF 1 Scheme, application number R3.0047/20. Our response to this, dated 8 June 2020, highlighted that:

There are concerns in relation to the nearby Appleford Level Crossing as the scheme looks to cut off access to housing across the level crossing. Therefore, it is likely an alternative access over the railway will be required, such as the installation of a footbridge.

An assessment of the impact the development would have on the nearby Appleford Level Crossing should be included within any Transport Statement and / or Transport chapter of the submitted Environmental Statement. The assessment should include any suggested mitigation...

Clarification is requested whether or not this matter has been addressed by the assessments supporting the application. Section 16.3 of the Environmental Statement 'Consultation with relevant stakeholders' summarises comments received from other consultees, however there is no reference to NR's response mentioned above.

The highways scheme passes close to the level crossing at Appleford and appears to include a private access to the adjoining residence (only). This section of the main line is heavily utilised by rail traffic and is forecast to experience increased demand for passenger and freight flows, arising from work associated with the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study. Consequently, we need to better understand the implications of this scheme for the Appleford crossing.

Specifically, Network Rail policy is to close level crossings where possible, to improve the safety of both the rail and highways networks. Consequently, we are keen to work with the scheme promoters to review any opportunities for the closure of this crossing.

Applicant Response: The Applicant engaged with Network Rail prior to the submission of the application to discuss the Appleford level crossing under the following Network Rail reference: GW3044. A series of meetings was held and below is a summary of the final meeting that took place regarding the level crossing.

"The HIF1 scheme decreases the potential future usage of the level crossing as it provides a more convenient and attractive route for the 8 authorised users.

The HIF1 scheme proposes to divert some of the PROWs in this area, which reduces the likelihood of NMUs [non-motorised users] using the level crossing.

OCC does not intend to make any changes to the level crossing but closes one access on the north side of the Railway Cottages through the introduction of the new road on embankment, a noise barrier and a vehicle restraint system. Access to railway cottages can be signed appropriately to discourage access.

The scheme provides improved NMU facilities to the north and east of Appleford, maintains existing east to west Public Rights of Way and creates a new circular route to / from Sutton Courtenay. These create alternative NMU routes away from the level crossing.

In addition, OCC is seeking to incorporate safeguarding of land in an emerging employment development proposal for a future potential pedestrian / cycle bridge over the railway. However, there is no funding identified for this."

Representatives of Network Rail who attended the meetings were content that the proposed design addressed their comments.

Existing highways crossing of railway: A415 Abingdon Road

The proposals incorporate the A415 grade separated crossing of the railway at Culham. While there appears to be no proposals directing impacting the bridge, it is expected that the scheme will significantly increase flows of road traffic over this rail crossing.

As noted above the, Didcot to Oxford main line is heavily utilised as a strategic rail corridor and consequently major upgrading of this route is proposed, including electrification and the possible addition of a third running line.

We are keen to understand any assessments that have been carried out for the changes in traffic and pedestrian flows that are expected in this area, as these relate to both the A415 crossing and the adjoining minor road bridge south of Culham station.

Network Rail looks forward to working with the scheme promoters, to review the need for bridge improvements in the Culham area, taking account of the implications of both the highways schemes and future rail infrastructure requirements.

Applicant Response: The Applicant will continue working with Network Rail regarding the A415 railway crossing.

Rail transport of construction materials

Oxfordshire benefits from a number of active railheads, which are used for receiving aggregates in support of construction projects, and these would be well located relative to this scheme. The Didcot to Oxford route is also established as a part of the Strategic Rail Freight Network, bringing opportunities including increased provision for freight train paths under our future strategic plans.

We note that a detailed Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been prepared, as explained in both the Didcot Garden Town HIF1 Scheme Environmental Statement Volume I Chapter 16 (Transport) and in the Transport

Assessment. The CTMP details the high levels of HGV traffic that will be generated by the scheme, however it is disappointing to note that no consideration has been given to the use of rail transport for the construction phase of the scheme.

It is strongly recommended that, as part of an approach supporting sustainable construction, maximum use of rail is made for transporting materials required by this project. This should take the opportunity to exploit the presence of the railheads already established nearby, including Appleford among other locations. Network Rail is keen to work with the applicants to develop a Materials by Rail strategy, building on experience elsewhere in Oxfordshire, where promoters of major schemes are actively working to incorporate the use of rail in supporting construction.

Applicant Response: The Environmental Statement submitted with the planning application was prepared to assess a worst-case scenario, in this case, all construction materials travelling to site by road. The Applicant is aware of the environmental benefits of transporting construction materials to the site by rail and will continue to liaise with the owners of sidings near to the site to ascertain if it is possible, given that some of the sidings are used daily by their owners for operational purposes.

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